



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

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Chairman Inouye Calls for Regular Order and Restoring Discipline to the Budget Process

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator Daniel K. Inouye, (D-Hawaii), Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today delivered remarks on the Senate floor in which he called on his colleagues to work across party lines to restore regular order.

Sen. Inouye's Remarks:

“Mr. President, today the nation faces a difficult political landscape when it comes to addressing the major challenges facing our country, such as unemployment and the deficit. The American public is demanding that the House and Senate work with the President to address these concerns. I believe the American peoples’ understandable and growing concern over the national debt is shared by every Member of this body. But in order for the Congress to address our fiscal crisis we must fix our broken budget process.

“Today, with Fiscal Year 2011 nearly halfway over, as a result of the Congress’ inability to finish its work, the federal government is still operating on stopgap funding designed to avert a government shutdown.

“This is no way to govern. Continuing Resolutions make it difficult for federal agencies to perform their duties. As Secretary of Defense Gates has stated very clearly, operating under a CR places a great burden on the Department of Defense. The same can be said of every federal agency. Our failure to act responsibly makes the everyday functioning of government more difficult and less responsive to the needs of the American people.

“Moreover, Continuing Resolutions make a mockery of our Constitutional responsibility to allocate taxpayer funding wisely. Putting the country on budgetary autopilot is simply unacceptable. It is well past the time to cast aside the blistering campaign rhetoric of the fall and find the means to compromise.

“Mr. President, many new members of this body were elected on a promise of a return to fiscal responsibility. I would suggest that returning to regular order in our budget process is a necessary component to achieve this goal. The Appropriations

Committee produces 12 individual bipartisan spending bills, but when the Congress fails to act on them through regular order, we wind up with a trillion dollar Omnibus bill, or a trillion dollar Continuing Resolution that cedes the power of the purse to the Executive Branch.

“Neither the most liberal nor the most conservative member of this body should prefer an Omnibus or a CR over regular order in our budget process.

“Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to sit down with the new Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Congressman Hal Rogers of Kentucky, to congratulate him on his new position. During our discussion we both agreed that the Congress needs to re-establish regular order in the appropriations process. Both chambers need to pass its bills and allow us to work out our differences in conference. Mr. President, I believe that if we adopt this approach we can do our part to help this nation regain its economic health.

“The first step in the process is the adoption of a budget, to provide the framework for Appropriations bills. The House must step up to the plate with a budget that is workable. It cannot hide behind vague rhetoric and arbitrary spending caps. It should not insist upon irrational programmatic cuts that would devastate the everyday lives of the American people.

“Likewise, it is imperative that the Senate do its part in moving a budget through a responsible and regular order process, including the timely adoption of a budget resolution.

“If a budget resolution is not adopted by early May, the Appropriations process is delayed. Every week of delay further diminishes our ability to finish our work prior to the end of the fiscal year.

“In recent years, all too often Appropriations bills have been held hostage as Members offered message amendments knowing that they would not pass, while the time needed to complete 12 freestanding bills slipped away. And by September, we had abandoned any hope for finishing all 12 bills, as the calendar simply did not give us enough time.

“We Democrats must recognize that regular order cannot exist without bipartisan cooperation. Last year, despite the lack of a budget resolution, the Committee completed almost all of its work, preparing 11 of 12 appropriations bills for floor consideration in a timely manner. However, gridlock on the Senate floor eliminated any further progress. If a more open amendment process for relevant amendments will enable these bills to move forward, we should be open to such an approach, even if that means taking some uncomfortable votes. This chamber is split 53-47. Both sides will need to give a little bit, and in so doing, it is my hope that we can get the bipartisan appropriations process back on track.

“Certainly, no Member of this body wants to explain to his or her constituents why we have failed – yet again – to responsibly fund the government, or ceded our constitutional authority to the Administration. Or – even – why we were unable to work together responsibly to avoid a disastrous government shutdown.

“We must find a way to accomplish the tasks that the Constitution has assigned to us. To do this, we need a budget resolution; we need the House to send over appropriation bills in a timely fashion; we need floor time and we need a willingness to vote on amendments. Without these four things, there is no doubt in my mind that I will be standing in this chamber in late September, yet again, seeking passage of a Continuing Resolution in order to avoid shutting down the government.

“Mr. President, the House and the Senate need to find a way to work together to pass our bills under regular order, and send them to the President. This is the only way we can restore discipline to the budget process. It is the only way we can maintain our constitutional responsibility to determine how taxpayer dollars are spent. And, it is truly the only way we can avoid repeating the catch-all spending bills that none of us want.”

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